

**Opening Remarks of the
Honorable Michael M. Reyna, Chairman and CEO
At the Farm Credit Administration's
Commemoration of
Gay and Lesbian Pride Month
June 27, 2002**

Welcome ... and thank you for coming to today's showing of HBO's award winning presentation, *The Laramie Project*.

Before we begin, I would like to make a few brief remarks to help put today's presentation into a broader historical, and hopefully more human, context.

Liberty is one word that most Americans hold near and dear to our hearts ... it permeates our collective being as a country ... it is part of the fabric of our national heritage.

For example ... from The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, which states:

"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

... From the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, which states:

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

... From our Pledge of Allegiance, which states:

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag and to the Republic for which it stands; one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Liberty is an important cornerstone and a founding principle of our nation. We are taught this in school, and are beneficiaries of it, by virtue of living in this great country.

Liberty: our founding fathers built a nation upon it ... and our civic and social leaders -- both past and present -- have urged us to pursue it vigorously and protect it at all costs.

"America was established not to create wealth ..." said Woodrow Wilson, "but to realize a vision, to realize an ideal -- to discover and maintain liberty among men." And ...he went on to state "America lives in the heart of every man everywhere who wishes to find a region where he will be free to work out his destiny as he chooses."

"We must scrupulously guard the civil rights and civil liberties of all citizens, whatever their background," urged President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ... "We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred, is a wedge designed to attack our civilization."

Liberty is the essence of what America is ... and why it was founded.

Mathew Shepard was pronounced dead at 12:53 a.m. on October 12, 1998. He was the victim of a savage and brutal beating; he was a victim of hate and intolerance. Clearly, he was murdered for who he was as a person; and as such, Mathew was denied his basic civil rights ... the right to his life, his liberty and his pursuit of happiness.

Today's film unquestionably focuses attention on man's inhumanity to man; and, as is it does, it teaches us ... as author John Cogley Commonweal wrote ... "Tolerance implies a respect for another person, not because he is wrong, or even because he is right, but because he is human."

By all accounts, 8 to 10 percent of America's citizens are Gay or Lesbian, which translates into millions and millions of people. If this estimate is applied to FCA, then upwards of 30 employees are Gay or Lesbian. These individuals are our friends, our colleagues and our coworkers.

In fact, Gays and Lesbians are our brothers ... our sisters ... our aunts and uncles ... cousins ... our friends, neighbors and loved ones. As citizens ...they too are part of this great country.

As we view today's film presentation, let us keep in mind that America's strength --- in other words ... our strength --- lies in our willingness to respect and protect unpopular views, opinions and beliefs ... in short ... to respect each other.

Let us embrace tolerance -- respect for one another -- as a sign of strength ... and in doing so, strive to live up to America's great promise by ensuring that no person's civil rights are unduly abridged or compromised.

My friends ... America's heritage is rooted in liberty ... so too, is its future.

Thank you for being here for today's presentation.